Johnson Memorial Church

HUNTINGTON, WEST VA.

DEAR BROTHERS:

On the night of Friday, January 10, 1890, the Rev. J. W. Johnson, pastor of the First M. E. Church, South, of this city, while taking the Royal Arch Degree in Huntington R A. Chapter, No. 6, was precipitated by the slipping of a rope, a distance of 12 feet. He lingered in agony until Sunday morning when he passed to the better world. This event, so shocking in its nature, and so unparalelled in the history of Freemasonry, produced among men of all classes a profound sensation and especially among his Masonic brethern in whose midst he met his tragic fate. The particulars of this sad incident obtained a world-wide notoriety, and were no doubt noticed by you at the time.

The Church of which our deceased brother was pastor, has begun the erection of an edifice to his memory to be known as the Johnson Memorial Church. The building to cost about $15,000, will stand on a beautiful lot in the heart of this, the second city in the State, and will be a fitting tribute to the memory of one of God's noblemen. To this worthy object we feel many of his brethren and ours of the Mystic Tie will gladly contribute, and so send out this letter, assuring you that any contributions you may make will not only be gladly received and appreciated, but used to the very best advantage in building what we would make a joint monument of Church and Masonry, to the memory of our deceased brother. Please give this matter your immediate attention.

J. A. BLACK, Pastor.

L. H. BURKS,
H. C. HARVEY,
GEO. F. MILLER, JR.,
T. S. GARLAND,
C. H. RICKETTS,
} BUILDING COMMITTEE.

See preceding page R

MASONIC REFERENCES.

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HUNTINGTON, W. VA.

Send all contributions to

H. C. HARVEY, Treasurer of B. C.,
Huntington, West Va.

From the Grand Master of West Virginia.

Office of Grand Master of Masons for Grand Jurisdiction of West Va.

Grantsville, West Va., April 13th, 1891.

I consent to the circulation of the foregoing communication amongst the several Lodges and Masons of this Grand Jurisdiction, and cordially commend the same and the object thereof to the favorable consideration of the craft.

JOHN M. HAMILTON, G. M.

Huntington. West Va - Jan. 10. 1890.

VOL. XLVIII. NO

MASONIC TRAGEDY.

The Huntington Sensation.

How a Popular Preacher Lost His Life.

While Being Initiated Into the Mysteries of the Order

Part of the Secret Machinery Suddenly Gives Way,

And the Candidate Is Precipitated Into a Deep Vault.

The Fall Results in Fatal Internal Injuries,

And Relief Comes After Several Hours of Intense Suffering.

Full Description of the Accident and Attendant Exciting Scenes.

Previous Cases on Record Where Death Has Cast Its Shadow Over the Solemn Ceremonies.

Masonic circles are greatly agitated over the shocking accident at Huntington, W. Va., which resulted in the death of a candidate taking the Royal Arch Degree.

It is the first instance on record where any accident of a serious nature has occurred in the ceremonies of that degree.

In fact, the ritual which initiates the candidate into the Royal Arch mysteries is considered much less dangerous than that of any other degree.

Prominent local Masonic lights state that as far as their records and memories go there have not been over half a dozen such accidents in this country.

THE STARTLING FATALITY

Has thrown the city of Huntington into general mourning, and by no class of the community is Mr. Johnson's fate more regretted than by the secret fraternity whose ceremonies closed the reverend gentleman's useful career. Mr. Johnson was pastor of one of the largest congregations in Huntington, and outside of his immediate flock was also held in the highest esteem.

Sunday was the memorial service that at the [illegible] the Opera House, the largest hall in the city was densely packed and hundreds were turned away from the door.

THE REMAINS OF THE VICTIM

Arrived in Cincinnati by the Chesapeake and Ohio train shortly after 7 o'clock yesterday morning. They had been escorted from Huntington by a delegation of prominent citizens and Masons. At the Grand Central Depot the casket was transferred to the Big Four train, the destination being Hannibal, Mo. The immediate escort, which will convey the remains to the family in Missouri, consisted of T. W. Peyton, representing the Huntington Masons, and Rev. Mr. Black, pastor of the Southern Methodist Church at Catlettsburg, Ky., and an old and intimate friend of the deceased.

In the face of the great and unexpected sorrow which has befallen the lodge, its members have torn aside as far as possible the veil shielding the mysteries of the ceremony, and explained fully the details attending the accident. The building was built specially for Masonic purposes. In the third floor is the lodge room proper. As is usual, three candidates had offered themselves for

THE ROYAL ARCH DEGREE.

But, owing to a recent accident, one of them was absent. It was decided to put through the remaining two, Rev. Mr. Johnson, pastor of the Methodist Church, and Rev. W. F. Marshall, pastor of the Episcopal Church.

One feature of the ritual occurs in what is known as the dark room. This is an apartment on the third floor. It is about eight feet wide and twenty long. At one end is a window, and at the other a door, opening into the lodge room proper, which is lighted with electricity. In the middle of the little room is three-foot trap which opens into a vault, or an arrangement like an elevator shaft. This vault extends from the ceiling of the second story to the floor, is some eight feet square, and walled up with wooden partitions. It has a depth of some thirteen feet. In the ceiling of the dark room is a hook, to which is fastened a

DOUBLE BLOCK AND TACKLE.

The first block is close to the ceiling, while the second is near the floor and directly over the trap. A rope seven eighths of an inch thick passes three times over the top block. It is attached to a ring above the second block, the end being wrapped around similar to a hangman's knot. Beneath the lower block hangs a short loop, through the end of which is passed a short stick or bar. This stick is straddled by the candidate, his legs hanging on either side, while he clutches the block with his hands and holds himself in position. He is then lowered into the vault by the members of the lodge, who have hold of the other end of the rope, which generally lies loosely piled upon the floor. The ceremony at this point is symbolic of the search in the

RUINS OF KING SOLOMON'S TEMPLE.

The vault represents the ruins and the candidate one of a party making the search. He descends into the vault, and finds in one corner a small box, which is typical of the Ark of the Covenant. After this he is raised again to the "Dark" room. Next follows the lecture, during which is explained the ceremony he has just passed through and the Biblical events it symbolizes. The block and tackle had been in constant use by the Huntington Lodge for over three years. There had never been any thing to arouse the slightest suspicion of its weakness. In fact, the machinery, paraphernalia and furnishings of the lodge room were the finest and most complete of any in the State.

The initiation of the two preachers began last Friday evening. It was about 10 o'clock when the dark room was reached and arrangements for the final ceremony commenced. One of the members, Mr. Crider, had descended into the vault and made the usual preparations. He had been taken out. Rev. Mr. Marshall then

WENT THROUGH THE ORDEAL,

Was lowered into the symbolic ruins and again returned to the room. There were six or seven members taking part in the ceremony besides the two candidates. The scene was a rather weird one. On the window-sill rested an oil lamp, whose flickering light threw fanciful shadows on the walls of the "dark" room. The door at the other end was open, and the rays from the electric lights entered. The vault looked like a black, yawning chasm. Neither of the candidates was blindfolded. Both could see every thing that was going on, and perfectly understood the workings of the machinery by which they were to descend into the vault. Mr. Johnson was a tall, well-built man, weighing some 180 pounds. He had seated himself straddle the bar, and caught the block with his hands. Suddenly there was a whirring sound. The end of the rope was seen to

JERK LOOSE FROM THE RING

Above the block. In some way, most probably from the long and constant use, the rope had been gradually becoming loosened and unwrapped, and Mr. Johnson's heavy weight detached it entirely. The end flew toward the ceiling, and there was a sudden relaxation of the entire machinery. Mr. Johnson disappeared, and an instant later was heard the dull sound with which he struck the hard floor of the vault, thirteen feet below. The members standing about the trap and holding the rope were almost paralyzed by the accident. Their cries brought the rest of the lodge to the apartment. One coil of the rope still remained over the upper block. With it Mr. Peyton, a slightly-built gentleman, was lowered into the vault. Lights were brought and the unfortunate preacher was found lying on his side at full length. He had struck on his left hip. Mr. Johnson was not unconscious, but his deep groaning showed he was suffering the most intense agony. A ladder was lowered into the vault, and, with Mr. Peyton's assistance, he was enabled to slowly mount until ready hands could

DRAW HIM OUT OF THE VAULT.

He was carried to a stretcher, and Drs. R. D. Vickers and John D. Meyers summoned. While awaiting their coming Mr. Johnson described his experience. In the brief moment while he was falling his whole life, he said, seemed to be passing in review before him. He expressed mentally his satisfaction that there were not others dependent upon him, and that, if death came, he was ready to meet his God. The minister told this as the sixteen members of the lodge surrounded the stretcher, and urged upon them the importance of always being ready, for none knew when the summons would come. For nearly two hours Mr. Johnson lay in the lodge room. The attending physicians examined him, but could detect no outward sign of injury. This led them to pronounce his condition as not dangerous. Still he continued to complain of the most agonizing pain, especially about the lower part of the spine and chest. He was borne to the Methodist parsonage where he resided. All that night and the next morning he continued perfectly conscious. He repeated the assurances, which he had given as he lay in the lodge room,

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE ACCIDENT,

That he held the members entirely blameless, for his injuries had resulted purely from an unforeseen and unavoidable accident. Although suffering almost unbearable agony, Mr. Johnson calmly declared he was resigned to his fate, and that he felt the supreme satisfaction of a Christian ready and anxious to meet his God. The scene was a very affecting one, several of the members being moved to tears. It was resolved to attempt to make no secret of the manner in which Mr. Johnson met his death, but rather to give the fullest possible publicity to the details in order that no censurse might rest on the lodge.

About 3 o'clock Saturday afternoon he became semi-conscious from the powerful drugs administered to alleviate his intense sufferings. He lingered in this condition until 1 o'clock Sunday morning, when he peacefully passed away.

Naturally the reports of the accident created intense excitement in Huntington. The Masons made no effort to keep the details secret, and, on the contrary, took especial pains to explain fully the manner in which the accident happened. Particular stress was laid on the fact that the utmost dignity is preserved throughout the ceremony, and that nothing savoring in the slightest of

LEVITY OR PRACTICAL JOKING

Is permissible. The result is that the intelligent and larger part of the community acquits the lodge of any blame.

Sunday evening special services were held at the Southern Methodist Church, of which Rev. Mr. Johnson had been pastor for a little over a year.

At 8 o'clock a union memorial service was held at the Opera House. It was crowded throughout, and fully 1,000 persons were turned away from the door. Remarks eulogizing the deceased were made by Rev. M. Sadler, of the Baptist Church; Rev. Messrs. King and Black, of the Methodist; Rev. J. M. Sloan, of the Presbyterian, and Rev. Thos. Clayton, of the Congregationalist. Rev. Mr. Marshall, who was Mr. Johnson's companion candidate in the initiation, stated how the accident had occurred, and very feelingly described the scene in the lodge room.

MR. JOHNSON CAME

To Huntington a little over a year ago from Hannibal, Mo., where he was pastor of a church. He has living there a brother and sister, to whom he requested that his remains be taken. He was about 40 years of age, and had been a widower for some time. A peculiarly sad feature is that he was to have been married February 12th next to a prominent young lady of Catlettsburg, and all arrangements for the nuptials had been com-

pleted. Members of his congregation were looking forward to the wedding with much gratification, and were preparing to welcome the bride to the parsonage.

The deceased was over six feet tall, and built proportionately. He wore a long, dark beard, and was exceedingly dignified and fraccial in his manners. With his own church and the people generally of Huntington he was exceedingly popular.

The physicians pronounced the immediate cause of Mr. Johnson's death failure of the heart, due to shock and internal injury. The Masons suggested the advisability of a postmortem to determine the exact extent and character of the injury, but the friends of the deceased expressed some opposition, and it was not made. Examination of the remains showed there was not the slightest external mark or bruise.

WHAT CINCINNATI MASONS SAY.

The fatal accident in the Huntington Lodge caused a great deal of comment yesterday among Cincinnati Masons. It was all the more surprising as none of them had ever heard of a serious accident while the Royal Arch degree was being exemplified.

Colonel Enoch T. Carson, who has taken the very highest degree in the Masonic order, was seen yesterday at his office on Third street, and stated he had read THE ENQUIRER'S account of the affair with much interest.

"There is no reason why accidents should occur in any of the degrees," he said, "provided proper precautions are taken. As for myself, I generally inquire very particularly about the candidates, and when a fellow tells me he is feeling nervous I look out for him. Of course a candidate has got to keep his head about him. If he loses that, something may happen.

THE PARTICULAR THING

In the present case is that there is less danger about the Royal Arch degree than any of the others. It is the easiest of all—just as easy as to carry a hod—but, of course, in carrying a hod you've got to keep a cool head or you'll fall from the ladder. The drop in the Huntington Lodge room was only about a dozen feet. In taking one of our degrees there's a drop of over sixty feet. Here in Cincinnati we've always been very careful. In fixing the machinery and making the other arrangements over there in the Masonic Temple, I consulted with a physician so as to avoid any possibility of an accident. There can be no accident if proper care is taken. I am afraid the Huntington brethren were a little negligent in not examining and testing the rope. Still it is a thing that could happen only through the purest accident. As far as my memory goes, there have been some half a dozen

FATAL ACCIDENTS TO CANDIDATES

While being initiated in the various degrees. I have never heard of any in the Royal Arch Degree except that at Huntington. They have mostly occurred in the Third or Master's Degree, which you might term the most exciting of all. The danger, of course, is from nervous shock, and it is always best to find out if the candidate has ever been threatened with heart trouble. The last case I can recall occurred some six or seven years ago. A candidate in a Pennsylvania lodge was taking the Master's Degree when he suddenly fell to the floor, and when picked up he was dead. A sudden nervous shock had affected his heart and caused death. Of course, there had to be an examination and the Coroner investigated the matter. I don't remember whether there was a formal inquest or not. The Masonic influence in that community was great, and my impression is that the matter was finally smoothed over and nothing came of it. Very little publicity was given to the affair. This is the only case of which I can at present

RECALL ANY OF THE DETAILS."

Mr. William B. Melish, also a very prominent member of the Order, was seen. He declared that there was no reason for accident in any of the ceremonies, and especially in those attending the taking of the Royal Arch degree. In fact, there was no real necessity for the deep vault. In many of the lodges the candidates merely walked into a room, which did equally as well, as the ceremony was entirely symbolical. The greatest offense that could be committed in a lodge-room would be to do something which would make light of the proceedings or detract from their dignity. Whenever accidents occurred, no effort was made to conceal the manner in which they occurred. It would be useless. The man was dead, and then the law officers stepped in. The worse thing in such an event that Masons could do would be to claim the victim died in the elevator or hallway, and bind themselves with an oath to swear to the falsehood. The facts would be bound to come out some time. Had such things been done, the Masonic order could not have lived as long as it had. In his long experience he could remember but one accident. During the ceremonies at the Scottish Rite Cathedral one of the participants, but not a candidate, had broken his leg by jumping from the stage.

The candidate who was to have been the third in the initiation party was Captain Schweickert, conductor on the Chesapeake and Ohio Road. In the accident near White Sulphur Springs both of his legs were broken, and he is now laid up. Schweickert, Johnson and Marshall started in Masonry together, and had taken all the degrees together up to the sixth. But for the railroad accident Schweickert would have been present when Johnson received his fatal injury.

MASONIC RITES.

Convocation of St. Paul's Royal Arch Chapter at Egyptian Hall.

The [illegible] of St. Paul's Royal Arch Chapter at Egyptian Hall, Masonic Temple, last evening. The report of the auditors was a very satisfactory one to all the members. During the administration of the retiring high priest, Ex. Comp. Edgar O. Dewey, the membership has increased 125, making the present number 627, and the increase in the permanent fund has been several thousand dollars. The chapter accepted the report of the nominating committee and proceeded to an election of officers for the year ensuing, the result being the unanimous election of the following companions: M. E. H. P., William P. Brechin, M. D.; E. K., Samuel F. Hubbard; E. S., Albert A. Browne; C. of H., George E. Savory; P. S., William G. Whitney; R. A. C., John A. Bowker; treasurer, Henry G. Fay; secretary, Theo. H. Emmons, this being his 30th re-election to the office; trustee, Reuben E. Denmon; committee on charity, William White. Ex. Comp. Brechin announced the following appointments: M. of third V., John H. Woodman; M. of second V., Walter U. Lewison; M. of first V., George A. King; S. S., Edwin C. Wheelock; J. S., William R. H. Stark; chaplain, Ex. Comp. Charles J. Miller; organist, William H. Gerrish; tyler, J. Fred Sampson; master of wardrobe, Theodore H. Emmons. Ex. Comp. Dewey then invited Ex. Comp. Lafayette G. Blair to assume the chair and install the officers, which he proceeded to do, assisted by Ex. Comp. John G. Thorogood, acting as grand captain of the host. On the conclusion of the installation ceremonies Ex. Comp. Brechin thanked the installing officer for the beautiful and impressive manner in which he had performed the duties of the evening, and asked if there was any further business to come before the body before proceeding to close. Comp. Henry G. Fay then stated that a pleasant duty devolved upon him, it being that of presenting, in the name of the chapter, a past high priest's jewel to Ex. Comp. Dewey, and in eloquent language complimented Ex. Comp. Dewey upon his success, and stated that he had fully sustained his reputation as an earnest worker in the fraternity. Ex. Comp. Dewey replied in a feeling manner, and thanked the companion for the gift as well as for the hearty support they had given him during his two years' administration. The companions then repaired to the banquet hall, where a social hour was spent.

Killed by a Masonic Ceremony.

HUNTINGTON, W. Va., Jan. 13.—Rev. J. W. Johnson, of the M. E. Church, South, of this city, died at the parsonage yesterday from injuries received on Friday evening last, when, in company with Rev. W. G. Marshall, of the Episcopal Church of this city, he was passing through the initiation ceremonies of the Royal Arch Degree in the Huntington Chapter of the Royal Arch Masons. During the ceremonies it seems it was necessary that he should descend a vault thirteen feet deep by means of a rope tackle suspended from the ceiling above. Two other men had descended the vault previously, one of them being Rev. Mr. Marshall. After preparing the tackle, Rev. Mr. Johnson started to descend, when the knot fastening the tackle to the lower block gave way, and Mr. Johnson fell to the bottom of the vault. Medical aid was summoned, but he gradually sank and died.

1890.

See Circular on next page. R.

[illegible] Waite, William Penn, Mark Simons.

Ex-Companion Dewey was the recipient of many congratulations on his success as presiding officer, as well as his fine rendering of the ritual. During his term of service the membership has increased about 120.

CAPITULAR MASONRY.

St. Paul's Royal Arch chapter held its 71st annual convocation in Egyptian Hall, Masonic Temple, last evening. The report of the auditors was a very satisfactory one to all the members. During the administration of the retiring high priest, Ex. Comp. Edgar O. Dewey, the membership has increased 125, making the present number 627, and the increase in the permanent fund has been several thousand dollars. The chapter accepted the report of the nominating committee and proceeded to an election of officers for the year ensuing, the result being the unanimous election of the following companions: M. E. H. P., William P. Brechin, M. D.; E. K., Samuel F. Hubbard; E. S., Albert A. Browne; C. of H., George E. Savory; P. S., William G. Whitney; R. A. C., John A. Bowker; treasurer, Henry G. Fay; secretary, Theo. H. Emmons, this being his 30th re-election to the office; trustee, Reuben E. Denmon; committee on charity, William White. Ex. Comp. Brechin announced the following appointments: M. of third V., John H. Woodman; M. of second V., Walter U. Lewison; M. of first V., George A. King; S. S., Edwin C. Wheelock; J. S., William R. H. Stark; chaplain, Ex. Comp. Charles J. Miller; organist, William H. Gerrish; tyler, J. Fred Sampson; master of wardrobe, Theodore H. Emmons. Ex. Comp. Dewey then invited Ex. Comp. Lafayette G. Blair to assume the chair and install the officers, which he proceeded to do, assisted by Ex. Comp. John G. Thorogood, acting as grand captain of the host. On the conclusion of the installation ceremonies Ex. Comp. Brechin thanked the installing officer for the beautiful and impressive manner in which he had performed the duties of the evening, and asked if there was any further business to come before the body before proceeding to close. Comp. Henry G. Fay then stated that a pleasant duty devolved upon him, it being that of presenting, in the name of the chapter, a past high priest's jewel to Ex. Comp. Dewey, and in eloquent language complimented Ex. Comp. Dewey upon his success, and stated that he had fully sustained his reputation as an earnest worker in the fraternity. Ex. Comp. Dewey replied in a feeling manner, and thanked the companion for the gift as well as for the hearty support they had given him during his two years' administration. The companions then repaired to the banquet hall, where a social hour was spent.

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Lindsey N. Oliver.
Joseph O. Hayden.
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